

## PLAYROOM MAKEOVER

# 'We made our playroom a game in itself'

Valentina and Ashley Gross created a magical adventure with a themed entrance and a space to inspire imaginations!

### BEFORE



Valentina and Ashley Gross had been renting for a couple of years and taking time to look for their own home. 'I saw the details of this house two years ago, but as there's a bridge corridor dividing the main bedroom from the children's rooms I felt that it wouldn't work for us. Now we are all settled in, it is actually the bridge that the children like the most,' says Valentina.

The house was owned previously by an older couple, who spent a lot of time abroad,

This open-plan area features an adapted wardrobe, which acts as a secret doorway leading into the children's playroom beyond. It's handy to have this extra space for toys outside, in case Astrid and Diego need their own area to play

### STEP INSIDE...

**WHO LIVES HERE?** I'm Valentina Gross, 39, a stay-at-home mum. I live with my husband, Ashley, 36, a chef, our daughter, Astrid, 10, and son Diego, five. It's a five-bedroom, 1940s, detached house in Weybridge and we moved here in July 2020.

**WHAT WAS UPDATED?** We knocked through a wall, decorated the playroom and added shelving and a concealed opening.

**WHY THE CHANGE?** We wanted another entrance to the room so the children could play without coming through the kitchen. We wanted it to be bright, colourful, and an area where they could really use their imaginations.

**HOW LONG DID IT TAKE?** Around two months, as the shelving and doorway took time to design.

**TOTAL COST** £5,580



A specialist painter was brought in to create the distressed paint effect on the cupboard. The back of the door has been painted with blackboard paint for more fun and games, such as playing schools, and the door is lockable, too, as the playroom also doubles up as guest room when friends come to stay



Inside the playroom, vibrant blue shelving helps the colourful toys to pop and gives the room an encompassing and cosy feel

and their children had all moved on, 'so it didn't feel really lived-in and when all the furniture was moved out it was like a blank canvas – perfect to add our own style,' says Valentina. The kitchen was a priority for the couple, who both love cooking, so when it came to renovating the house, it was decided to tackle the downstairs areas first, which included the playroom.

### THE PROJECT

They decided to rework the downstairs layout so that the kids could run around freely without needing to go through the kitchen.

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'The kids, understandably, love to run around and play, but I didn't want them dashing through the kitchen when a lot of cooking was going on, so it made sense to open up the playroom, and for the children to be able to get through that way,' says Valentina. High on Valentina and Ashley's wish list was to create another opening so the space could flow downstairs – and they decided to do something a little different...

### WHAT WE DID

Valentina knew that she wanted to tackle various design projects throughout the house,

### IMAGINE THAT

Tell a story, paint a picture or let their imagination run wild in a space that's dedicated to creativity





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so she started looking for a suitable interior designer to help bring it all together. 'The options I was discovering online were very traditional, but when I came across Slightly Quirky, I loved the originality and vibrancy of the designs,' recalls Valentina. 'When I met with Caroline, Creative Director at Slightly Quirky, we clicked straight away. She was excited to use the colourful palette we discussed, and came up with some very inspiring storyboards.'

One idea was to install a hidden door just like Valentina had enjoyed in her childhood home in Venezuela. 'It was so fun as a child to have a secret area, like a hideaway, and I thought it would be great if the children could get to enjoy that, too,' says Valentina. The concept began to evolve as the project went on. 'We felt that two doors in one room would make it too much like a corridor, so we looked at it being concealed within the shelving,' says Valentina. 'Then Caroline

saw an antique wardrobe online and the idea of creating a *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*-style walk-through cupboard was explored. Then the wardrobe was adapted to open and lead through to the shelving in the playroom.

### HIGHS & LOWS

The design and construction process were quite time-consuming. 'It was a big building job because the wall that was knocked through was originally an external supporting wall,' explains Valentina. 'Initially, the opening of the wardrobe was not tall enough for Ashley to fit through, so we had to alter it to fit. Then a lion-head knocker was added, and a specialist painter came in to ensure that the same effect was continued throughout the whole wardrobe to conceal the expanding foam and blend in the amendments.'

All the disruption has paid back. 'It is so much fun to play and hide in there and it really feels like we have added a very unique feature,' Valentina smiles.

### THE FINAL DETAILS

Once everything fell into place with the cupboard and the shelving, Caroline found some fabric, Dandy Lion Blue from Corita Rose, with a lion within the pattern, and then the theme and colour scheme began to



### TOY STORY

Use the kids' colourful toys as accessories to style up joyful displays on shelving and surfaces

## DIY ideas



### Create your own magical hideaway with Valentina's tips

1. DIY your own hidden door. As we were doing a big home reno we opted to have ours made for us, but it wouldn't be too tricky to add shelving to a door to make your own hidden entrance. Look online for DIY tutorials.
2. Co-ordinate the look with paint. We had the shelving and storage unit doors painted in the same punchy blue so it all matches, which would be easy enough to do with existing furniture. Just be sure to finish it with wax or varnish so it will withstand wear and tear!
3. If your room has a particular colour or motif theme, find a fabric to match and reupholster a chair or footstool. We found the perfect print for our *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* room and it has made the chair a real statement piece.

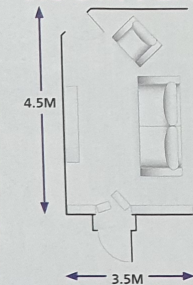


Wooden flooring replaced an impractical white carpet. Using the same flooring throughout makes the space feel cohesive

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Rather than installing another door at this end of the room, Valentina chose a wall of shelving that conceals a secret opening, while also providing storage for books and toys

### ROOM PLAN



### THE DETAILS

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| WARDROBE     | £990          |
| PAINT        | £140          |
| FLOORING     | £1,080        |
| ARMCHAIR     | £540          |
| SOFA BED     | £2,579        |
| ACCESSORIES  | £251          |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>£5,580</b> |

### SHOPPING LIST

Heavily carved antique oak linen press cabinet, £990, Vinterior. Walls painted in modern emulsion in Strong White, £59 per 2.5L, shelving painted in modern eggshell Drawing Room Blue, £81 per 2.5L, Farrow & Ball. For similar flooring try V4 wood flooring A104 Upland Oak, guide price £72 per sq m, Hampton Flooring. Aissa 3-seater sofa bed, £2,579; Snowdrop armchair, £540. Sofa.com. Armchair upholstered in Dandy Lion Blue, £120 per m, Corita Rose. Upholstery costs, £550, John Miller Upholstery. For similar blinds fabric, try Empower plain fabric by Harlequin, £23.25 per m, Jane Clayton. Topfinel outdoor cushion cover set, £25.99 for a set of 6; square cushions, £13.25 for a set of 4, both Amazon. Rug similar to chevron zig zag rug in Multi, £59, The Rug Seller. Anyday Harry floor lamp, £60, John Lewis & Partners. London bus, £49.95; fire engine, £39.95; popcorn machine, £29.95; My Little Bird House shape sorter, £16.95; Noah's Ark shape sorter, £29.95; tea set and tray, £24.95; ABC blocks, £29.95; London car set, £19.95; rainbow cloud pop, £19.95; rainbow tunnel toy, £14.95; café machine, £29.95; take away smoothies, £14.95; toaster set, £29.95; Carlo's ice cream stand, £19.95; space rocket, £15, all Le Toy Van.

### 3 OF THE BEST... bright geometrics

1. £8.99 from BeanBagBazaar. Outdoor cushions are a practical, easy-clean option for children's play areas.
2. £23 from Storigraphic. This fun, 1980s-style print is sure to spark creative minds.
3. £69.50 from Oliver Bonas. Finish the look with a statement light shade in punchy blue hues.

